

Presentation of Judith Crawford, Chair, SHIP Steering Committee

Thank you, Frank. I would like to add my welcome to the hundreds of local SHIP and aging services providers across the nation who have joined us today. My name is Judith Crawford and I am the state SHIP Director in Vermont and Chair of the SHIP Steering Committee, the elected leadership body of the state SHIP network.

As a state SHIP director who relies on our local aging network to sponsor our local SHIP programs here in Vermont, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to represent all state SHIP directors and express how pleased we are to welcome this new partnership between AoA and CMS, and the strengthened partnership that it brings to SHIPs and local aging services providers.

The coming months represent a great challenge for all of us. And we are all aware that both the amount of work to be done in reaching 42 million people with Medicare and the importance of our services to people with Medicare is so great that it requires us to work harder and in closer partnership than we ever have in the past.

We know that none of us can do this job alone. We need the help of the partners who are represented on this call today as well as the help from our CMS and AoA Regional Offices and the other partners who are joining in this Medicare Covers American education and outreach effort.

In light of the importance of this work, we in the SHIP network have benefited from the increased efforts of CMS to provide us with the information resources we need to train and equip our SHIP counselors to inform and enroll people in the new Medicare prescription drug coverage. I am pleased to learn that the partnership between AoA and CMS will allow more of these information resources to flow directly to local aging services providers. In this time of fast-paced change, we must all work together to maximize our resources, and increasing the flow of information to our local programs is an important part of that effort.

Now is the time to pull together for this important mission. The local staff and volunteers of our programs see firsthand the importance of this new prescription drug coverage to the people we serve. We know how, for some people, the financial burden of paying for prescription drugs severely cuts into their quality of life – or worse, how some people choose to skip taking prescription drugs because of the expense. As I have heard Dr. McClellan say several times – this historic change in the Medicare program creates for us an opportunity to pursue a mission of improving the lives of the people we serve by helping them understand and enroll in Medicare prescription drug coverage.

As SHIPs, we pledge our support of this partnership. For us, it is not a new partnership, as we already formally recognize AoA, NASUA, and n4a as SHIP partners. But we clearly recognize the importance of AoA and CMS working together to make sure that all of our state and local providers have the information resources that we need to help people with Medicare.

To those local aging services providers who are already formally part of our SHIP network, I want to express thanks to you on behalf of all of my fellow state SHIP directors and reiterate that your state SHIP director is there to provide you with the support and information you need to help inform and enroll people into this new prescription drug coverage. To those local aging services providers who are not formally part of the SHIP network, I also invite you to contact your state or local SHIP program to explore how you can work together to reach people with Medicare with news of this new coverage.

I am assured that this call is the first of what will be many opportunities that we will have to join together to learn and discuss our work to help seniors and people with disabilities. I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and I look forward to working even more closely with you in the coming months.

Thank you.